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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest reports on the findings of a 1984 Wingspread Conference on Strengthening High School World Studies Courses. The digest considers key challenges that the course poses for educators, the goals of the conference, long-term efforts that have been initiated, activities recommended by conference participants that would provide practical help to local schools, and current efforts to implement conference recommendations. Challenges facing educational leaders as they attempt to strengthen their world studies courses include the fact that there is no universal approach for teaching "world studies," that there is no mechanism for educational leaders to identify and assess successful practices, and that there is a critical need to help teachers and administrators enhance their capacity to teach world studies. Conference goals are then outlined, followed by four activities recommended as a way of providing practical help to local schools: (1) the development of a handbook outlining and analyzing alternative conceptual approaches to high school world studies courses, (2) the collection and dissemination of syllabi and other appropriate descriptions of world studies courses being taught in high schools across the nation, (3) the development of model resources for developing a global relations course, and (4) the strengthening of preservice and inservice programs by focusing on leadership and teacher preparation. A description of two projects resulting from these recommendations is followed by a list of nine related resources. (LH)

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STRENGTHENING HIGH SCHOOL WORLD STUDIES COURSES

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ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education

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STRENGTHENING HIGH SCHOOL WORLD STUDIES COURSES

by Richard C. Remy and Robert B. Woyach

The only formal instruction about the world that the vast majority of American high school students receive comes in a single social studies course typically offered at the tenth grade. Increased attention and debate has been focused on this vitally important curriculum opportunity in recent years.

This ERIC Digest reports on the findings of a 1984 Wingspread Conference on Strengthening High School World Studies Courses. The Digest considers (1) key challenges that the course poses for educators, (2) the goals of the Wingspread conference and the long-term effort it initiated, (3) activities recommended by the conference that would provide practical help to local schools, and (4) current efforts to implement conference recommendations.

What challenges face educational leaders as they attempt to strengthen their world studies courses?

In recent years, a growing number of states have mandated new courses in "world history" or "world civilizations." Requiring new world studies courses, however, created a significant challenge for many schools. Curriculum changes a decade ago led many schools to eliminate the traditional world history requirement. Student enrollments in subsequent, elective world studies courses were often low. As a result, the normal process of course improvement was often disrupted. Faculty with experience in teaching world studies declined.

Even in school systems that retained a world studies requirement, new demands for excellence brought nagging issues to the forefront. An NEH-sponsored report on the status of history characterized the world history course as "poorly taught, not well received by students, and confined to the unimaginative exposition of far too much data" (Alder and Downey 1985).

Demands for new or improved high school world studies courses pose a complicated set of challenges for the schools:

1. There is no agreed-upon approach to teaching "world studies." Traditional conceptions of a narrowly Euro-centric world history seem inadequate. Yet newer conceptions of global history or global relations can seem vague and ill-defined.
2. There is no mechanism for educational leaders to identify and assess successful practices. Experimentation with new approaches to world studies courses is occurring in many schools. Yet, new course improvement efforts routinely begin with a *tabla rasa* or a haphazard sampling of what has been done elsewhere.
3. There is a critical need to help teachers and administrators enhance their capacity to teach world studies. The average world studies teacher has been trained only in traditional, Euro-centric approaches to the course. Depending on university offerings and requirements, many new teachers will not have taken a world history survey course since high school!

What did the Wingspread Conference on Strengthening High School World Studies Courses try to accomplish?

In September 1984, the Mershon Center of The Ohio State University and Global Perspectives in Education, Inc., brought 38 leading historians, political scientists, administrators, teachers, and other professional educators together at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The conference, "Strengthening High School World Studies Courses," was supported by grants from the Danforth and Johnson Foundations. It was co-sponsored by ten major professional organizations (Remy and Woyach 1984).

The conference goal was to lay a conceptual and organizational foundation for future efforts to help local schools strengthen their world studies courses and curricula. Specifically, conference participants were to:

- identify and explore major challenges facing high school world studies courses today;
- weigh and debate possible strategies and opportunities for addressing these challenges; and
- discuss the role of scholars, colleges and universities, educational administrators, and professional associations in helping schools strengthen their world studies courses.

The conference and the long-term effort it began are not designed to promote a particular course of study or approach to world studies. Rather, the goal is to consider how examples of successful practices and the most current scholarship in history and international studies can be used to help teachers and local administrators strengthen their courses.

What can be done to help educators strengthen their world studies courses?

Participants at the Wingspread conference identified and debated various strategies for responding to the challenges schools face. Four activities which emerged from these discussions have received special attention.

Handbook on alternative approaches. A handbook outlining and analyzing alternative conceptual approaches to high school world studies courses received wide endorsement in conference discussions.

A number of conceptual approaches to world studies courses represent academically sound frameworks for organizing the subject matter of world studies. At the same time, each approach accomplishes different goals and has different strengths and weaknesses. A handbook on contending approaches could outline and differentiate major approaches (e.g., Western civilization, global history, world geography, world cultures, global issues, international relations) to the course. Each approach could be analyzed in terms of pedagogical strengths and potential pitfalls. Basic topical frameworks which faithfully implement each approach could be outlined.

Such a handbook could help local curriculum design committees, textbook adoption committees, curriculum supervisors, and local school boards make more systematic and informed decisions about the goals, organization, and content of their world studies courses.

Collection of syllabi. Conference participants expressed nearly unanimous endorsement of the idea of collecting and making readily available syllabi or other appropriate descriptions of world studies courses being taught in high schools across the nation.

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A collection of syllabi could be profitably used by teachers and curriculum administrators in several ways. First, it could help with short-term curriculum planning in school districts that must quickly implement a newly required world studies course. Second, collected syllabi could allow teachers to compare what they teach with the practices of their peers accross the country. Such comparisons are one key component of any effort at self-assessment and self-improvement. Third, a collection of syllabi could facilitate local curriculum development by providing ideas from a larger spectrum of possibilities. Finally, collected syllabi might be used in a variety of ways to strengthen preservice teacher education courses.

Resources for developing a global relations course. Special resources are needed to help schools that wish to develop or improve existing global or international relations courses. Such courses are frequently offered as electives. In some cases they serve as an alternative to the more familiar world history course. Across the nation, such courses have attracted increasing attention and interest.

Yet teachers interested in developing or teaching a global relations course face a formidable obstacle. They have no textbook or similar set of accessible and integrated student materials. Thus, teachers do not have an opportunity to see what a global relations course might include. They have no core of factual information for students around which a course can be readily built.

The development of model student materials would enable teachers, curriculum committees, school board members, parents, and students to see and assess a global relations course. Such materials should be prepared by experienced curriculum developers working closely with teachers, students, international relations scholars, and historians. They should be designed to fit the needs of average teachers and students. The materials would not represent "the correct approach" to the subject matter; but they would provide a credible approach suitable for high school students. The model could then compete in the marketplace of curriculum ideas along with other approaches to world studies.

Leadership training and teacher preparation. The need to strengthen preservice programs and inservice opportunities for world studies teachers was a clear priority for many participants at the Wingspread conference. Conference participants agreed on the need for prospective world studies teachers to take "core courses" in world studies. Such core courses should include, but may not be limited to, a global history survey. A number of participants also favored increasing the total number of required credit hours in world studies. Preservice programs, even at prestigious institutions, require only about half the credit hours for teaching certification that are required of academic majors.

In the area of leadership and staff development, conference discussions focused on strategies for leadership training. Regional training programs designed to help local staff developers upgrade their skills and knowledge base were suggested. Also considered were training programs designed to assist curriculum committees plan and initiate change efforts.

Have efforts to develop these resources begun?

The co-conveners of the Wingspread conference have initiated two projects which implement key conference recommendations.

The *Handbook* project. With funding from the Danforth Foundation, the Mershon Center is currently developing a *Handbook on Alternative Approaches to the High School World Studies Course.* The *Handbook* will provide a conceptual roadmap for teachers and curriculum policymakers faced with deciding the direction to take in their world studies courses.

The heart of the *Handbook* will be a series of five major approaches to the course (i.e., global history, Western civilization, world cultures, world geography, and global relations). Prepared by respected scholars from a variety of disciplines, each chapter will contain:

- a rationale for the approach described;
- an analysis of key concepts and ideas highlighted and excluded by the approach;
- an annotated bibliography; and
- exemplary syllabi which illustrate the approach in terms of classroom practice.

An introductory chapter will present criteria for judging any approach to world studies. It will also discuss articulation of the course with other courses in the high school social studies sequence. A final chapter will outline a teacher-based assessment strategy which can be used by school districts to evaluate their courses.

The SCAN project. Global Perspectives in Education, Inc. (GPE), has begun the development of a computerized resource system. Among other things the System for Communication and Networking (SCAN) will include syllabi, bibliographies, and exemplary teaching materials for high school world studies courses. GPE has already begun the collection, review, and cataloging of syllabi and materials. Each item included in the system is assessed in terms of its practicality and its value to global perspectives education.

When fully developed, SCAN will enable system members to locate and retrieve materials directly via a computer and modem. This will decentralize the system, giving schools and school districts far greater access to SCAN materials.

For information about these two projects, contact the Mershon Center or Global Perspectives in Education.

RESOURCES

Following is a bibliography of resources, including references in this Digest. Those entries followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and/or paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For price information write EDRS, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210.

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